



West Nile Virus

California Department of Food and Agriculture
Animal Health Branch

West Nile Virus (WNV) is spread by mosquitoes that primarily affects birds, humans and horses. While horses are susceptible to WNV, many horses infected with WNV will not develop any illness. Of those that do become ill, approximately 30 percent die or must be destroyed. In 2003, there were nearly 5,000 confirmed cases of equine WNV reported in the U.S. **If your horse becomes infected, it is not contagious to you or to other horses.**

The first horse to become infected with WNV in California was confirmed in October 2003. Because California has many mosquito species that are very efficient transmitters of this disease, WNV will likely spread rapidly throughout California in 2004. Know the clinical signs and work with your veterinarian for mosquito control and vaccination programs.

Clinical Signs

Lack of coordination, stumbling, circling, falling • weakness or partial paralysis of limbs • muscle twitching (especially around nose and lips) • an inability to rise • drooping lips, smacking, and grinding teeth.

If you observe any of these signs, contact a veterinarian.

Vaccination

Two different vaccines are available for horses. The timing of these vaccines is critical because they must be administered prior to disease exposure. Contact a veterinarian for advice.

Mosquito Control

Eliminate mosquito-breeding sites

- Drain unnecessary standing water.
- Clean water containers: bird baths, plant saucers, etc., at least weekly.
- Schedule pasture irrigation to minimize standing water.
- Keep swimming pools optimally chlorinated and drain water from covers.
- Stock water tanks with fish that consume mosquito larvae (local mosquito control may provide assistance) or use mosquito “dunk” available at hardware stores.
- Stable horses during active mosquito feeding times (dusk/dawn).
- Use screens when mosquitoes are eliminated prior to stabling.
- Use approved mosquito repellents with DEET.

Facts about WNV

- Horses infected with WNV are not contagious.
- Mosquitoes that feed on infected birds spread WNV.
- A mosquito that bites an infected horse cannot spread the virus to another horse or person.
- Horses are not known to spread West Nile Virus to people. However, horses suffering from undiagnosed symptoms should be evaluated by a veterinarian since serious diseases such as rabies present symptoms similar to WNV.
- Horses infected with WNV will not be quarantined by regulatory officials.

If you find a dead bird call 877-WNV-BIRD. Note the bird's location, type and condition. The bird should show no signs of decomposition or maggots.

On-line resources

CDFA: www.cdffa.ca.gov **DHS:** www.westnile.ca.gov

CDC: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/wnv_horses.htm

USDA: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/wnv/wnv>.

UCD Center for Equine Health: www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ceh/



CDFA Animal Health Branch Offices

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